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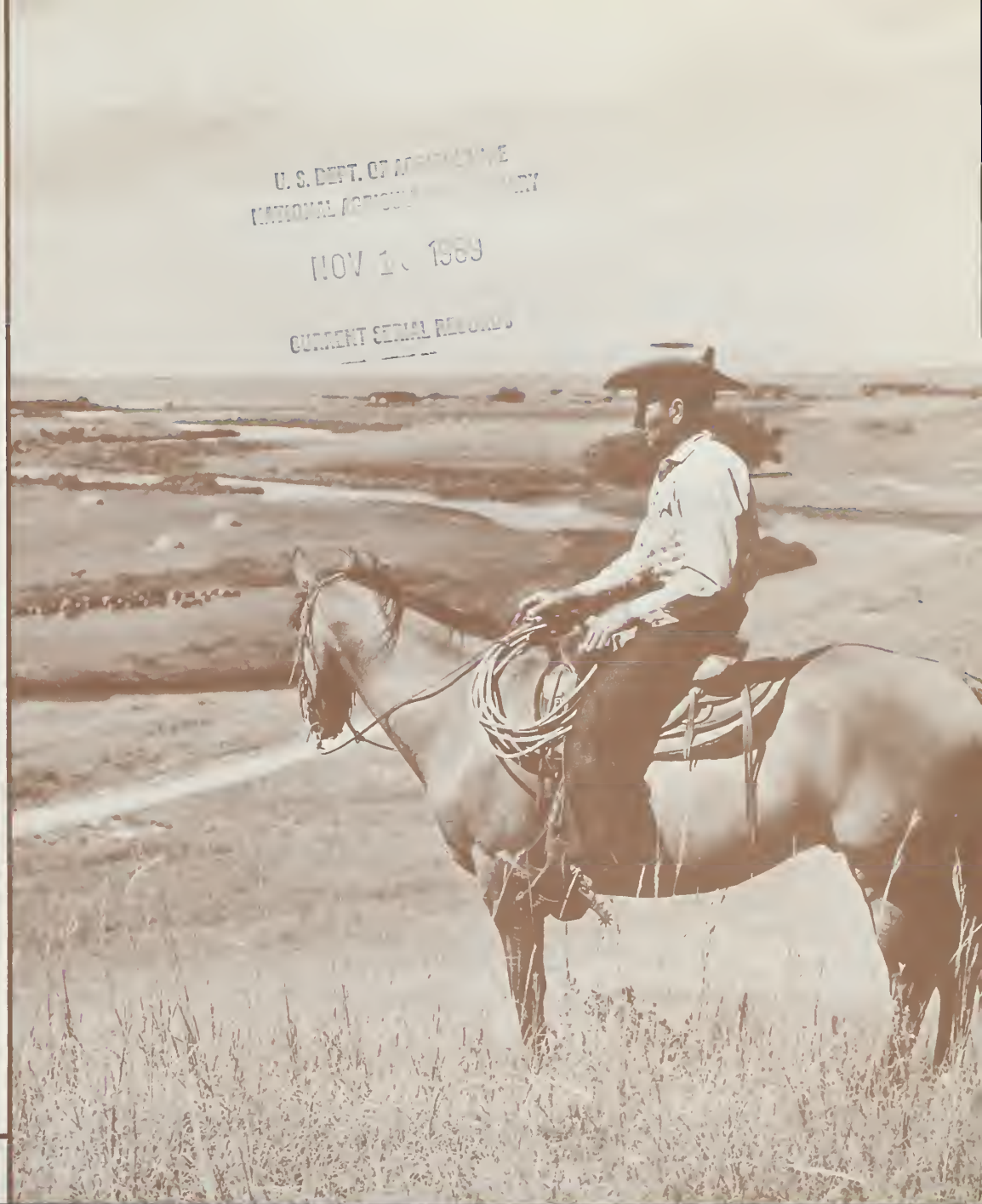
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THE GREAT PLAINS CONSERVATION PROGRAM

A PROGRESS REPORT

PA 669, NOVEMBER 1965
Slightly revised September 1969

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BLUEPRINT FOR CONSERVATION ACTION



The Great Plains conservation program, designed by Congress in 1956 to provide a means of minimizing the hazards of farming and ranching brought on by erratic climate, is a special program for an urgent need in a specific region.

In certain ways it differs from other programs directed at conserving soil and water.

- It requires the farmer or rancher to develop a complete long-range plan for making the needed changes in his land use or in his cropping system needed to conserve the soil and water resource.
- The farmer or rancher (producer) enters into an agreement with the Secretary of Agriculture to carry out the plan according to a schedule acceptable to the producer—but within 10 years.
- All cost sharing for the entire job—ranging from 50 to 80 percent of the cost—is earmarked when the agreement is signed. Cost sharing is paid as the producer completes each step of his plan.
- Technical assistance by the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in planning and installing the conservation measures is at an accelerated rate.

AN ADDED TOOL FOR EFFECTIVE CONSERVATION

All resources of the U.S. Department of Agriculture are directed toward assisting producers in the Great Plains in their effort to install complete soil and water conservation on their farms and ranches. The Great Plains conservation program, a tool for use through soil conservation districts, is administered by SCS.

Designation of a county by the Secretary of Agriculture for participation in the Great Plains conservation program is based on local need and interest. The number of participating counties has increased by 202 since the program began in 1957. Farmers and ranchers in 423 counties in the 10 States of the Great Plains region are now eligible for this help.

Other services of the Department for conservation also are available to Plains farmers and ranchers in combinations that they believe will best help them conserve soil, water, and grass resources; for example, credit from the Farmers Home Administration; cost sharing from the agricultural conservation program; education assistance from the cooperative extension services; and research by USDA and the land-grant colleges and universities.

Summary

31,100 farmers and ranchers cooperating	
56,600,000 acres covered by complete soil and water conservation plans	
\$108,019,865 in cost sharing obligated	
\$ 79,922,000 in cost sharing paid	
Acres of average-size unit	1,819
Average Federal cost sharing per unit	\$3,471
Per-acre cost of complete conservation	\$1.91
Plans completed (contracts fulfilled)	10,909



Changing unsuitable cropland to conservation uses

Applied	1,458,982 acres
Planned	1,814,000 acres
(21 percent of total cropland)	

In the Great Plains, at least 10 million acres of cropland not suited to cultivation should be converted to other uses.

Getting a protective cover on such land is one of the Great Plains conservation program's major objectives. This usually means the planting of grass or trees. New planting techniques and new or improved plant species have enabled farmers and ranchers to adjust the land use of eroding cropland to useful grass or other cover.



Reseeding damaged and depleted rangeland

1,060,426 acres

Reseeding drought-damaged rangeland—or range that for other reasons is producing below its potential and is susceptible to erosion damage—is proving a rewarding investment for participants in the Great Plains conservation program.

Improved seeding methods, special equipment, and dependable forage species are providing new resource stability and new economic stability to thousands of Great Plains ranching enterprises.





Livestock-water development

Wells drilled	11,561
Dams and dugouts built	16,434
Springs developed	1,349

The Great Plains conservation program is making it possible for ranchers to develop adequate and dependable watering places for livestock. Water is essential to the proper distribution of grazing and protection of the range resource.





Permanent fencing

7,553 miles

Fencing is another key to the proper management of grass. It makes possible rotation grazing, which gives grass a chance to recover and to reseed. This means a greater output of forage and more stable economic return for the producer. Fencing also permits deferring grazing while newly established grass gains in vigor.



Control of competitive shrubs

3,472,539 acres

Rewards from the control of brush in the Great Plains have been dramatic for some ranchers.

Vast acreages of competitive trees and shrubs are one of the Great Plains' most difficult problems. But progress in techniques and new equipment is giving greater effectiveness to efforts at control.

Investment in brush control—repeated as needed—is contributing to the economic stability of many livestock enterprises.

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Spreader ditches or dikes

92,314 acres

Where water races over the land during high runoff, a system of dikes and ditches often can slow its rate of flow to give time for it to sink deep into the soil.

Installing such a system halts erosion and improves the grass cover. The yield of hay and other forage has helped many farmers and ranchers achieve economic stability in their livestock operation in the Great Plains.

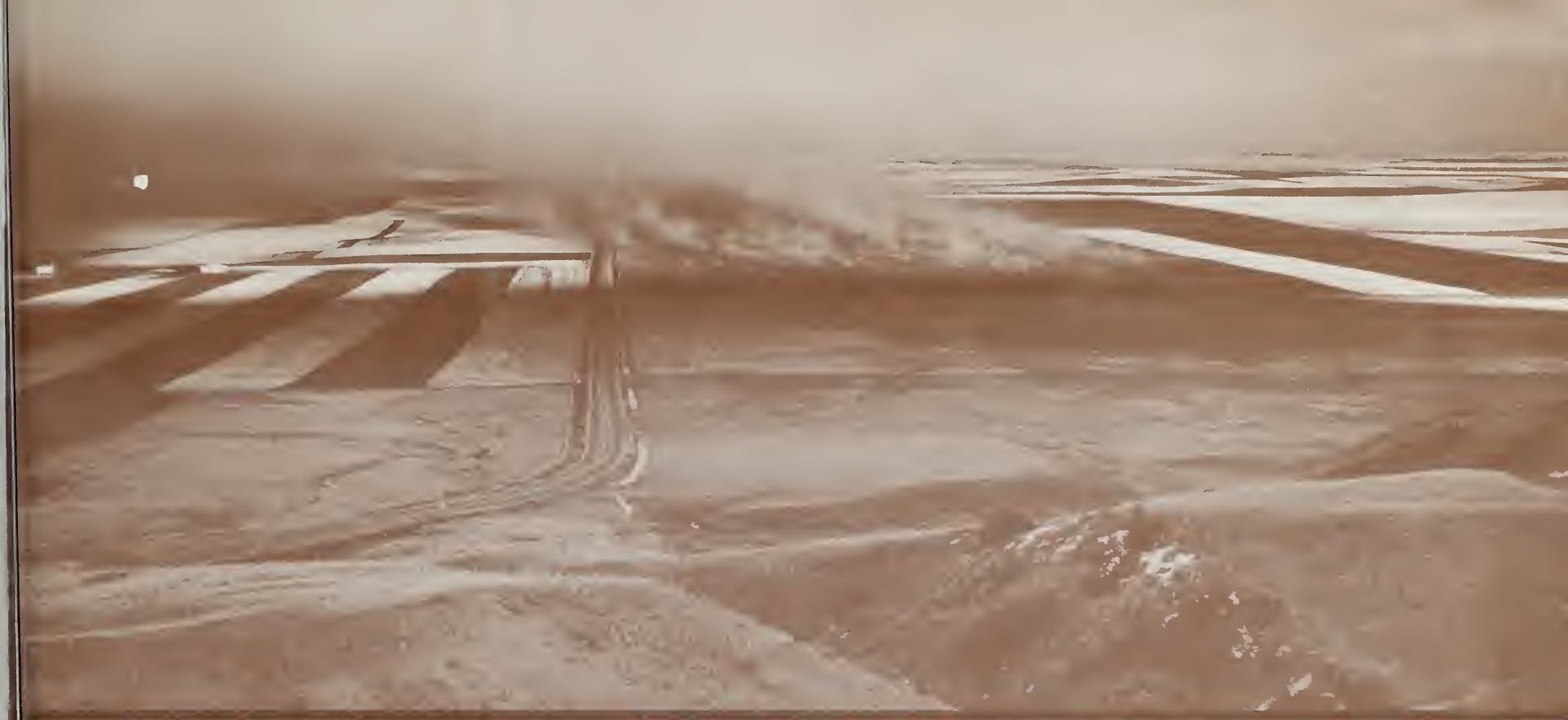


Tree windbreaks

24,806 acres

Throughout the Great Plains, rows of trees protect land, animals (domestic and wild), and homes of people. These particular trees, chosen because they will grow there, reduce the force of the wind passing over the Plains.

Tree windbreaks also help to distribute moisture and hold it in the soil for the use of plants, to provide homes for wildlife, and to make the rural landscape attractive.



Wind-erosion control

Field stripcropping	525,760 acres
Contour stripcropping	114,115 acres

Crops planted in strips—at right angles to the prevailing wind of the Plains or on the contour—are helping prevent the duststorms the area is subject to because of its erratic climate.

Water-erosion control

Terraces

47,267 miles

Terracing cropland in the Great Plains is helping control erosion by water and to make more efficient use of moisture in an area where moisture is usually scarce.

Terraces detain the water from heavy rains, permitting it to soak into the soil. Excess water moves off in orderly fashion without eroding the soil. This means more dependable yields for the farming enterprise and greater economic stability for the farmer and for his community.



Permanent sod
waterways

24,732 acres

Sod waterways, with the protective grass well established and maintained and in well-shaped channels, provide outlets for the excess water that flows from terraced cropland. They not only help prevent water erosion; they also produce forage.





Irrigation system reorganization and improvement

Number of systems reorganized	2,875
Linear feet of irrigation ditches lined	1,262,456
Acres of land leveled	138,850

In most of the Great Plains area, irrigation water is limited. An efficient irrigation system makes efficient use of both water and soil. Reorganizing an irrigation system, lining ditches or installing underground pipe, and leveling to remove the high and low spots in fields can mean using less water from the limited supply.

Irrigation in the Great Plains can be especially important to livestock producers in a dry year.



Stubble-mulch tillage

Stubble from the preceding crop is an effective cover to help prevent both wind and water erosion on cropland.

Besides protecting the soil against erosion, stubble or other plant residue at its surface increases its intake of moisture and contributes to improving its structure.

Tillage equipment designed to leave stubble and other plant residue on the surface has become widely used throughout the Great Plains by conservation farmers.



Proper use of range

Permitting grazing animals to take no more than half the forage produced in a growing season keeps range plants vigorous. Healthy, high-producing range plants mean a more stable economic enterprise. They also keep soil erosion at a minimum.

Stubble-mulch tillage and the proper use of range and pasture are regarded as management practices which, because of their recurring nature and of their clear advantage to the producer, are not cost shared. They are noted in the agreement between him and the Secretary of Agriculture, however, and are carried out as carefully as are the cost-shared practices.

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF THE GREAT PLAINS CONSERVATION PROGRAM



It is fully voluntary on the part of the individual farmer or rancher.

It has the incentive of local leadership; local soil conservation districts assume this leadership.

It is carried out in close cooperation with interested Federal, State, and local governmental units and organizations and other groups and individuals.

A conservation plan, including a time schedule, is a prerequisite to participation.

The farmer or rancher is encouraged to carry out his plan in the shortest time possible consistent with the climate and his resources.

He is assured of cost sharing from the U.S. Department of Agriculture in establishing his conservation plan under a long-term contract.

Consistent with good management, he may use the land established in vegetative cover under the contract for grazing or other purposes.

The GREAT PLAINS CONSERVATION PROGRAM is in addition to and complements other U.S. Department of Agriculture programs in the area.